

THE PROOF OF OUR MINISTRY

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though He was crucified through weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you. Examine yourselves, as to whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates?”
2 Corinthians 13:3, 4, 5

THE apostle had much joy in being the founder, the father, and the fosterer of so many churches, but this joy brought with it constant and heavy trial. Care pressed heavily upon him, for he mentions it as the crown and crush of all his burdens—“That which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” He was not simply as a father among them, but he was as a nurse, continually on the watch, and in all tenderness, anxious for her little ones. He was deeply grieved when he saw anything wrong lest he should have labored in vain, and should see any perish who appeared to be hopeful converts. He always had in his mind’s eye the account which he would have to give at the last, and his prayer was that he might render that account with joy and not with grief, for he adds, “That is unprofitable for you.” His whole soul went after the people of his charge, and his heart sank within him when he observed prominent sin among them.

The Corinthian church was enriched with many gifts, but impoverished by slender grace. This church had elected to conduct its arrangements upon the principle of everybody speaking who had something to say, moreover, it chose to be a church without rule and order, not caring to appoint officers who would be shepherds of the flock. That church seems to have been a frequent trial to the apostle, and after writing to them once very earnestly, he wrote to them a second time with equal tenderness and energy, and then he said he would have to visit them in person, and when he did come he would by discipline among them, make them know that Christ would not endure sin in His church. Whatever they had to say about Paul personally he meant to be faithful to God and to the truth, and he was sure that the power of God would be with him to support him in the work of reformation. He writes in a sorrowful strain, and yet one cannot help seeing how calm and judicious he is, how deliberately he inquired into evidence, and how impartially he judges the case. He had an intense desire to do the right thing, and therefore passion and prejudice did not operate upon him. In this particular text he shows the high qualities of moral courage, inflexible justice, loving tenderness, and wise prudence, proving himself to be a fit leader of the host.

On account of Paul’s having put his finger upon the mischief that was among them, the Corinthians turned round upon him and disparaged him, his letters might be weighty and powerful, but his personal presence was weak, and his speech—well, it was contemptible. They questioned whether he was an apostle at all. Had he lived with Christ? Had he sat at Jesus’ feet? No, it was apparent to everybody that his conversion took place after the departure of the Lord, and you could never be quite sure that he had been supernaturally called as he said he had been. Thus they murmured among themselves. From this ordeal Paul does not shrink for a moment, but he answers all their evil speeches in the language before us.

First, notice that he exhibits *God’s chosen method of operation* in the church by His appointed servants. This is a very interesting feature in the text. Secondly, he shows them what was *the sure proof of power*, and then, thirdly, he turns the tables upon those who had examined him, and bids them *give the needed proof of themselves*, “Examine yourselves; prove your own selves; know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates?”

I. The apostle Paul teaches us in these verses **THE LORD'S CHOSEN METHOD OF OPERATION.** The rebellious Corinthians had spoken ill of the apostle as lacking in power, his personal presence was not commanding, his speech was not fascinating, and so forth. Paul does not deny the charge, nor endeavor to exalt himself, but he glories in his infirmities because the power of God rests upon him. He admits anything they may have to say about his deficiency in natural dignity and elocution, but he declares the general principle of *power in weakness*, by which the Lord conducts the matters of the gospel dispensation. Power in weakness is the great secret of the gospel mode of working. Life, born of death, is the life of our souls, a life which would never have been in us at all if it had not been for the cruelest death on record, when men crucified the ever-blessed Lord. The apostle says, in verse four, "Though He was crucified through weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you." That is to say, our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished His mighty purpose by becoming weak, through His weakness He became able to suffer, and to die—in order to save us from the thralldom of sin.

It was necessary that the Infinite should lay aside His power, and become an infant, that He who rules over all things should become Himself obedient unto death; that He who wore the royal robe of sovereignty should be found in fashion as a man. He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and fulfilled the divine law. Yes more, inasmuch as a great sacrifice must be offered for sin, a death was required, but it was not possible that God, regarded as God purely and simply, should die, therefore Jesus stooped to our weakness, and by weakness received the power to die, if I may call it so, that He might by that death redeem us. By assuming our weakness He gained the power to act as our substitute, and put away our sin by the sacrifice of Himself. I am not aware of any other passage of Scripture where weakness is in so many words ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ. This makes the text the more striking. Remember that there was resident within His complex person a boundless power which He could at once exert. He occasionally permitted some outgoings of that power to let men see that His subjection was voluntary. He said of His life, "No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." Yet He was weak, so that another was called in to bear His cross; He cried, "I thirst"; He appealed to His God, saying, "Why have You forsaken Me?" and He was brought into the dust of death. He only spoke to those who came to take Him, and they fell backward, a word would have brought Him twelve legions of angels; truly did He say to Pilate, "You could have no power at all against Me, except it were given you from above." Yet as a voluntary captive He was bound, and as a willing substitute He died, "He saved others, Himself He could not save." Even on the cross He displayed abundant evidence that He possessed inherent omnipotence, for before He gave up the ghost, the midday sun veiled its face, and traveled on in tenfold night. The veil which hid the holy of holies was torn in two as by giant hands; the rocks were split; the earth shook, the dead arose, to let men see that He who died in weakness was none other than the Son of God. He used His weakness as the instrument of His strength by which He became almighty to redeem.

Now, you perceive that this weakness of Christ is the way in which He exerts a wondrous power among men. Because of His being obedient to death, even the death of the cross, "God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth." Because He died in weakness, He has become mighty to save by the putting away of sin. Has He not already finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness? By this sign He conquered, the ensign of His bloody cross is the seal of victory. It is Himself wounded, Himself hung up as a malefactor, Himself dead as a victim on the altar before the most high God, it is Himself thus slain which is His power to pardon and to save.

You know brethren that our Lord's power over our hearts comes by His great love, and the matchless manner of His showing it. Stooping so low to save such unworthy ones He conquers our hearts. His dying love has begotten living love within us. It sends a spear into the heart of sin that Jesus yielded His heart for our sakes, this nails up the hands and feet of our rebellious lusts, to think that Jesus was crucified for us; this leads us in golden fetters, the happy captives of His mighty grace, when we behold how His love stooped to the curse for us. The weakness of Christ is stronger in its power over our hearts than all His strength could have been. It is by weakness that Christ has achieved His mighty purpose. Today He has left His weakness on the cross, and gone upward to His throne, but there He sits clothed with a glory born of His weakness. The eyes of my faith even now behold Him. I am glad I do not see Him

more clearly, otherwise I must cease to speak to you, and fall at His feet as dead, so great is His majesty, so glorious is His exaltation. That glory in our esteem has sprung out of His weakness, His sorrow, His death. Your brightest coronet, O Christ, is fashioned from the crown of thorns! You are lovelier now than You ever were before! The marks of Your passion have made You altogether lovely in the eyes of Your people!

Why did Paul interject this teaching? It was to show us that this great principle runs through all God's work in the saving of men. He does not save men today by the strength of His ministers, but by their weakness, and it is not the power of the gospel, judged after the manner of the flesh, that is to conquer nations, but as in our Lord's case, the victory is to be won by weakness. Look at Paul, himself—he came among these Corinthian people, and I dare say, when they were first converted they felt like the Galatians, that they could pluck out their own eyes and give them to him, but after a while, when he was very faithful, they turned against him, and said he was no orator, he had no great force of conception, or majesty of diction. The apostle was willing enough to admit that he was devoid of such showy gifts. Though you and I at a distance think very greatly of Paul, and very rightly so, yet among those quibblers he was lightly esteemed. He did not give himself the lofty airs of the great teachers of the day, and therefore foolish persons despised him. Some liked Apollos better, and others preferred Cephas, and thus they formed parties, agreeing in opposing Paul, but agreeing in nothing else. Paul was willing to lose all personal honor though, in truth, not a whit behind the chief of the apostles. He said, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us." He cheerfully sank that His Lord might be exalted.

Moreover, in those days there was a great liking among the people, especially those who thought themselves educated, for the Greek philosophers. They said to one another, "Have you studied Solon? Have you accepted the teaching of Socrates? Have you drunk in the doctrines of the divine Plato? That is the man! In him there is depth of reasoning and breadth of thought. As for this Paul, he does not seem to care for the great masters of thought." "No," says Paul, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." They looked for philosophy and did not get it, and he did not mean they should. "But at least," they said, "what he has to say ought to be delivered with all the graces of oratory, after the best manner of the schools." "No," says Paul, "my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." If he had power among them, he determined that it should be the power of the Holy Spirit and no other power. The charms of oratory are but a poor and fickle force, tricks of language are a wretched sort of witchcraft. Instead of the colored flames of fancy, Paul would let into their minds the pure white light of the truth as it shines from the cross. Those things which were looked upon in those days as the chief instruments of power by which orators swayed human minds, Paul deliberately renounced, and relied on higher forces. He kept to the preaching of the cross, which was to them that perish, foolishness, but to the saved, the power of God. He put forward that side of the gospel which was most objectionable, so that to the Jews it was a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness. He did this of design, for so the Lord always works, making His divine power more glorious in the absence of that which is thought to be power among men. The apostle as a Jew was full of ceremonial teaching, which was very powerful with Jews, but to this he died. As a man he was well trained and deeply educated in philosophy, but to that he died also, knowing nothing but the cross and the scandal thereof. As his Master saved men by His weakness on the cross, so He did save men by His word spoken in the apparent weakness of Paul.

And yet again I believe the apostle meant this, that though he might have come among them if he had liked and said, "I am an apostle, I have supreme power over churches; out of this church I shall eject offenders without any question, for I am among you as your spiritual director," yet he never used such authority. On the contrary, he was the servant of all, patient to the last degree, gentle, humble, condescending, unselfish, fully consecrated. If any one was grieved, Paul was grieved with him; if any suffered trial, Paul was tried. He might have said, as His Master did, "I am among you as he that serves." He did, after the divine example, continually wash the saints' feet. His was a humble manner, for he sought nothing of them but that he might lead them in the way of holiness and maintain peace in their midst. He was no lord over God's heritage, but the most humble of them all. He hoped all things, endured all things, believed all things for the sake of those entrusted to his charge. Thus he was a power among them, his evident self-sacrifice made him have more influence at Corinth than all their proud

leaders of division. By laying aside authority he became mighty to influence them for good. I desire to practice this lesson to perfection.

All of you, my brethren, who desire to be useful must learn that in self-sinking, your usefulness will be found. Do not seek to be great; try to grow less and less. He who becomes least is greatest of all. The way to rise in the peerage of the church is to go down. Do not take what you have a right to take, do not covet the position which you feel you might righteously assume, but take the lowest room, do the meanest service, be willing to be anything or nothing so that God is glorified. Be ready to be stuck in any corner, or stowed away in any lumber room, if such should be the will of God, and then the probability is that you will be largely and honorably used. The way to success in the kingdom is by a constant sense of personal unworthiness and weakness. "When I am weak then am I strong." By death with Christ we come to live with Him, by being crucified with Him, we reign; by perfect self-surrender we obtain all things; he that saves his life shall lose it, but he that loses it for Christ's sake shall find it both here and hereafter.

I think you see the apostle's drift, and how completely he answered all objections against himself grounded upon his apparent unimportance and weakness. It only remains for us to meet all such charges against ourselves in the same satisfactory manner.

II. I come in the next place to a very important matter, and that is THE SURE PROOF OF POWER, the indisputable evidence of any minister's call from God to preach the gospel.

Notice the apostle says, "Since you seek a proof of *Christ speaking in me*." He did not care about what they thought of his own speaking, they might throw that to the dogs if they liked, but he was greatly concerned that they should not think lightly of the Lord Jesus who spoke in Him. If Christ speaks by any one of us, it will ill become us to see Him despised, and feel no sorrow. Brother, never care about your own speaking, but if it is really so, that the Lord Jesus bears witness to this generation through you, then do not allow Him to be rejected without entering your solemn protest.

A little further on the apostle declares that even the power of the living Christ is the power of God. Our Lord Jesus kept nothing to Himself but His weakness through which He was crucified, for He lives by the power of God. Such must be the power of every Christian worker, we are weak with Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God towards those whom we bless. It was said the other day, "It is a wonderful power which a certain man possesses; we see no cause to account for it." That man will not be true to himself or his Lord if he ascribes that power to his own personal acquirements, for if it is true power, it comes from that Spirit who distributes to every man according to His will. Power belongs to God, and that is the case even when He puts a measure of it upon men. Let that be understood once and for all.

Then, says Paul, "If you want a proof of Christ's speaking in me with power, look at yourselves." Paul says to his own Corinthian converts, "You are our epistle." If anybody inquires, whether Paul can write, Paul does not exhibit his hand or his pen, but he points to their lives—epistles "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." Beloved, you who are our flocks are the evidences of our being good shepherds. You are God's husbandry, and the test of how far our husbandry has been the Lord's husbandry must be found in your fruitfulness. If you want to know whether Christ has spoken in me, I reply, "Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you, examine yourselves." Our witness is in your hearts. The mighty power of the word of Christ has been proved within the arena of your experience, for it has moved you powerfully, influenced you wonderfully, and changed you supernaturally. What is more, it works in you still, for Christ is in you, "except you be reprobates." Jesus abides in you, and the proof of our ministry is the effect it has had and still is having upon your minds. To put it more correctly, the proof that Christ really does speak by us is that He has worked in you by that speaking, after such a fashion as proves the doctrine to be divine. Your souls are the seals of Christ's power. Standing here this morning, while yet the trumpets of joy have hardly ceased their silver sound, loving you, and blessing God for many of you who are the fruit of my labors, I feel upon my heart the burden of the Lord. In vain is all our mutual content in each other unless in very deed the gospel of God is confirmed and glorified in us. I feel compelled to say to you, beloved, that if the outside world demands a proof of my call from God, I must refer them to you for it, you to whom God has spoken by me must be the witnesses whether it is of God or not, and if you fail me my commission will have lost its seal. The *imprimatur* which establishes our right to our holy

office will be found in the influence of the gospel upon your characters. Listen then a moment with such sympathy with me as your love will inspire.

If you seek any proof of Christ speaking by me, you have it, first, in your own *conversion*, many of you. You will have no doubt of the minister's call if his testimony has brought you life in Christ. After I had heard a poor plain man preach the gospel, and had been brought to the Savior's feet by his testimony, if I had been met outside by a High Churchman, who thought that a working man had no right to preach, I would have had small patience with him. Suppose he had said to me when I was just converted, "The man is not qualified to preach, he has never been to Oxford or Cambridge, he has never been ordained, God cannot have sent him," I would have smiled at such nonsense, for I was sure God sent him, since by his means I had been brought up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay. You never doubt the validity of the orders—that, I think, is the acceptable religious phrase—of the man who has led you to the Savior. How could you? Whatever he may be to others, he is to you assuredly a messenger of mercy, a servant of the living God. "Give God the praise," they said to the man whose eyes had been opened by Jesus, "*we* know that this man is a sinner." "Ah," said the shrewd, ready-witted man, "whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." Was there any answer to that fact? In later days, when the chief priests and scribes saw the man that was healed standing with Peter and John, they could say nothing against them. The conversion proves that he by whose means it was worked was sent by God. If I have been made useful, to any of you, do not let me lose the reward of seeing you walk as those who are truly alive from the dead. Do not be fickle and unsteady, but continue in the faith grounded and settled, for he that endures to the end the same shall be saved.

Further, God proves that He has sent a man by the *comfort* which he gives to true believers by his ministry. The servant of God expounds the exceedingly great and precious promises, he describes the covenant of grace, he pictures the adorable person of the divine Lord, he bears testimony to the faithfulness of God and to the inward operation of the Holy Spirit, and in all this he ministers good cheer to the saints. Now, has it not happened to you while this has been done that your hearts have leaped within you? Have you not come into this place burdened, and while Jesus has been speaking to you, have you not lost your load? Do not many of you go on from week to week with merry hearts because of the word of the Lord which comes to you full of consolation? Well, then, whether it is I or any other preacher of the word, if by our speaking the Lord strengthens your weak hands and confirms your feeble knees, He points us out to you as messengers of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Oh, the riches of divine consolation! Have you tasted them? Then there is no disputing against taste, of all arguments that of experience is the most conclusive.

Further, when Christ, speaking in His servants, brings to us *correction*, it is an equal proof that it is of the Lord. You did not know it, but you had lived in the omission of a certain duty, light flashed into your soul by the hearing of the word as to that omission and with that light came love, so that you wept over your sin and ceased from it at once. Surely that was a proof of Christ's speaking in the minister. Have you not sometimes felt your hearts turned inside out, as if the spirit of burning were searching and purging you? Was not that of the Lord? Dagon sat upright enough in his own temple while he was left alone, but the ark of God was brought in, and by and by Dagon had to go down. There was a great crash, the Lord's ark had struck him, and only the stump of Dagon was left. Has it not been so with you through the preaching of the word? We must all confess that Christ's voice has been like a winnowing fan to drive away our chaff. His truth has blown through us like a strong northern blast, and it has swept down the withered leaves of our fancies, conceits, and self-reliance. Our cry has been, "We all fade as a leaf and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away!" We have stood bare and leafless before God, and thereby we have been prepared for another spring to clothe us with a fresher and more enduring verdure. That use of the word for correction becomes a definite answer to the question, "What is the proof of Christ speaking in us?"

Then, dear friends, the general *conduct and conversation* of members of a church must always be the best recommendation of the ministry which feeds them. My heart sinks within me when I hear of those who have been numbered with us, and have shared our love and esteem, and yet have behaved inconsistently. Is this to be laid at my door? I confess I cannot help blaming myself, and growing sad. Did I not hear of an earnest Temperance man in public, drinking in private? Is this the fruit of my ministry? Ah me! Did I hear of another professor whose household is a scene of constant strife? Did I observe

coldness and indifference creeping over others? Did I find a brother censorious and bitter? Is this the result of my labor? I could weep and break my heart. Do we hear of some that they are not upright and truthful in their dealings? Do people say, “These are members of Spurgeon’s church”? I do not blame the world for saying so. It is only just that men should estimate our ministry by its results. We cannot help such judgments, nor do we repine at them. You are either, our joy and crown or else our sorrow and dishonor. You must estimate whether a man farms well by the crops which he raises. True, you cannot condemn him if a few thorns and thistles spring up in the hedgerows, because those things are so natural to the soil that they are there in no time. But if the acres are covered with thistles, if there is a preponderance of weeds, everybody says, “This is wretched farming.” Farmers may make a great outcry about new machinery and artificial manures, but if there is no harvest it is poor work. Oh, dear sirs, by the love you bear to us, who labor for Christ among you, let your conversation be such as becomes the gospel of Christ. I cannot say this in words as emphatically as I desire to do. I should like to coin my heart in order to pass it round to you in living medallions, bearing each one this inscription—“*For Jesus’ sake be holy.*”

Unless you are a holy people, it is better for me that I had never been born. Unless you follow Christ, and exhibit His spirit wherever you dwell, what is the good of all our preaching? We might as well have stood upon a mountain and whistled to the wind as have pleaded with you unto tears. Unless there is a purity of life and a holiness of conversation in you as a church, I shall have sown dead seed. I think I can say faithfully that there is holiness among you, but oh, watch and pray that you enter not into temptation! Let each one among you be upon his guard lest in some evil hour he should bring dishonor upon the cause he loves, upon the Christ by whom he lives. Men do not read the Bible, but they read *us*—let us give them a good version of the Scriptures in our lives. They will not study our doctrinal opinions, but they will examine our practical examples, and if we are not what we ought to be, we wound the Savior afresh, stab at the heart of His gospel, and impede the progress of His kingdom. Oh, blessed Master, the faults of Your disciples are no faults of Yours, and yet the world lays them all on You! You are all holiness and goodness, and yet You have to bear blame for Your erring followers! Truly, my brethren, those of us who work for the great Master need not be at all surprised if we, too, have to take our share of the dishonor brought upon us by thoughtless or untruthful men. If Judas sins, John grieves; it must be so. God set to our ministry this attesting seal—that you may be a peculiar people, zealous for good works.

Again, dear friends, whenever the Word of God comes to your heart so that you *consecrate* yourselves wholly unto God and go forth and live the life of dedication, then you give proof of Christ speaking in us. When your zeal burns, when your hearts bleed for the perishing, when you speak by the power of the Holy Spirit who has filled you, when you go forth and work wonders by instructing the ignorant, impressing the careless, and guiding the wanderers to Christ, then again I can say, “Do you seek proof of Christ speaking by me? You are my witnesses inasmuch as by our word you have been stirred up to speak in the power of the Holy Spirit for the winning of souls.”

There is one more operation of God’s word about which I can speak with very great comfort to myself, and that is the operation of the word in the *completion* of the Christian character, and in the display of it in the last hours of Christian men and women. I have come down many times from the sick chamber of those members of this church who are now in the upper house, and I have done so with faith confirmed and joy increased. Those beloved ones have given me more strength and assurance than I ever derived from the study of the ablest works in my library. They were sometimes very poor, but I remember well the glory of the little room wherein they were disrobing for the beatific vision. Their heavenly serenity, varied with bursts of triumphant joy, has driven all my fears away. Some have been wasted with disease and racked with pain till it seemed impossible that an original thought could have come from them, and yet their speech has been fresh and new, an inspired utterance far excelling poetry. They only spoke what they were seeing, what they were enjoying, for the jeweled gates were set open to them, and they peered within and then turned round and told us a little of what they saw. It has been a glorious thing to find none of them trembling, none confounded, none wavering. No dying man has looked me in the face and said, “Sir, you did not preach a religion which a man can die with, you taught me doctrines which are not substantial enough for the dying hour.” No, I feel even now their death grips, as they have clasped my hand and told me of their overflowing joy. They have said to me, “Bless the Lord that ever I stepped into the Tabernacle to hear of justification by faith, of the divine substitution, of atonement

made by blood, and of a faithful God who casts not away His people!" Such expressions I have heard from those upon the borders of Immanuel's land. These are our seals and the tokens that Christ has spoken by us.

Go and speak, my beloved brethren in the ministry here today, with great confidence, for I doubt not you have the same assuring proofs. You that teach in the school, or in any way set forth Christ, be sure that God will confirm His own truth with signs following. He keeps an office open for setting the royal stamp on all truth that is earnestly proclaimed—proclaimed in weakness, but with true evidences of power, because mighty in those who believe it.

I hope you will bear with me in thus speaking of what has so plain a relation to myself, but truly these many years God has worked among us great marvels of grace, and I am overwhelmed when I imagine even for a moment what we would do if the Spirit of God were to withdraw. You will not turn your backs in the day of battle, will you? God will help you, and keep you steadfast in the faith once delivered to the saints, and He will help you to be a holy people, walking in your integrity, will He not? May He make all our people to be holy, for if not I shall have to go back to Him with many cries, for God will have humbled me among you, and I shall have to bewail those who have sinned. Alas for a ministry so publicly known if it is publicly dishonored. Alas for the people of the living God if traitors cause them disquietude. O church in this Tabernacle, "hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown"!

III. To each one of us there is A NEEDED PROOF OF OURSELVES. Hence the text says, "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith." It is something to have our ministry attested, but it is much more to have your salvation attested. Dear fellow believers, observe that you can know whether you are saved or not, assurance, yes, full assurance is within your grasp, but it is only to be obtained by a simple faith, and by a sincere and thorough examination of yourselves.

Observe, the apostle says, "examine yourselves," therefore you are not to take it for granted that you are saved, if you do, you may be sadly mistaken. "Examine yourselves." In London years ago every shop had its sign, and they had a saying that the house which had the sign of the sun in a certain street was darker than any other, all their sun was outside; it had the sun for a sign but no sign of the sun. So there are some who have grace for their sign, but no sign of grace. God grant we may not be such. To have a name to live is a wretched thing if we are really dead. In such a case we are nothing but living lies, devout deceits, bastard professors, in a word "reprobates." To pretend to be other than what we are in the sight of the heart-searching God is despicable and damnable.

The Spirit of God by the mouth of the apostle bids us, "examine *ourselves*." Of course we are to examine our lives, but He goes further, and says, "Examine yourselves." Sin within will ruin even if it is not seen in act. Of course we are to examine our doctrines, but even more we are to examine *ourselves*. Heart error is more deadly than head error. Self-examination has not to do with garments but with the man, himself. Yes, you did pray very prettily, but was that prayer out of yourself? Yes, sir, it was an admirable sermon and apparently very earnest, but is it your soul's utterance, or only a parrot lesson? "Examine yourselves," your own persons, as in the presence of the Most High.

Supposing you have done this, then do it again, for the next sentence is, "Prove yourselves." Pry deeper, thrust the lances in further. You have already given yourself a good sifting; take a finer sieve and go to work again. You have already been in the crucible—go in again, and become as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times. A man cannot make too sure work about his own salvation. "Oh, but," someone says, "I never doubted my own safety." Remember—

*"Who never doubted of his state,
He may, perhaps he may, too late."*

One stands up and has the impudence to say, "I never sin." Sit down, sir, do not dream that you are among fools, we know better. You may hold your fond conceit if you please, but meanwhile we pray for you; the Lord open your eyes to see the sin in you, for pride is blinding you, its scales are upon your eyes. "In many things we offend all." "Enter not into judgment with your servant: for in your sight shall no man living be justified." What man is he that does good and sins not?

We must again and again examine ourselves. But can we not be certain of our safety? Yes, we can, but certain because we have not shunned the most rigorous self-examinations. If you do not test yourself you may sit down and say, "Oh, I am all right." Yes, but you may be fostering within your spirit a peace which will end in your final ruin, and you may never open your eyes to your deception till you lift them

up in hell. Be ready to be searched. It is well when a man likes a heart-searching ministry, when He says, “Cut deep, sir, do not spare me, if I am a hypocrite, let me know it.” I like a man whose prayer is, “Lord, let me know the worst of myself, that I may be upright before You. Search me and try me, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” This is what we want. This is the age of shams, sham preaching, sham hearing, and sham professors, we must strive after realities. There are such things as common graces, which will not save, and worse still, such things as counterfeit graces, which will destroy. Therefore, let us see to it that we first examine and then prove ourselves.

And what is to be the point of search? “Whether you be in the faith,” whether what you believe is true, and whether you truly believe it, whether your faith is the faith of God’s elect, the faith that is of the operation of the Spirit of God, or mere nominal, notional, temporary faith. “Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith.”

Dwell mostly on this point, “Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates?” Is Jesus Christ in you? “I know all about Him.” Yes, but is He in you? “I read of Him.” I read of Him. Read on, but is He in you? Come, friends, let us each one put this question to himself, “Is Jesus formed and living in my heart?”—

“There is life in a look at the Crucified One.”

But you have not looked at Him unless He has come to live in you, the first glance of the eye that sends the soul to Christ also sends Christ to the soul. That man is not in Christ who has not Christ in him. Do you have to go a long way to get at Christ? Then you may well tremble, for with true saints Christ is at home, formed in them, the hope of glory. Except you be counterfeits to be rejected and thrown away as slag of the furnace, Christ is in you at this very moment. This is very heart-searching; let it search your hearts.

Within a short time, and none of us knows how soon, our Lord will come, quick ears can hear the rolling of His chariots. Perhaps before that, you and I may be called away, are we ready? I do not often enter this place without being told, “So-and-so is gone.” I cannot help looking upon this vast congregation as moving along in procession to the tomb, I am also myself marching with you. We are all going together, and we shall meet together at the judgment seat of Christ. I would not have you say in that day, “We came to hear you, and you did us no good, for you tickled our ears, and tried to play the orator.” I never did anything of the sort. I do protest it before the living God I never thought of such a thing. I have strived to strike straight at your hearts and consciences. You shall not say that of me either here or hereafter. But when we meet in the judgment you will say, “It was power in weakness, Christ spoke in you, we were converted, comforted, and sanctified by Him.” Ah, we shall meet, brothers and sisters, we shall meet on the other side of Jordan, in the land of the hereafter, in the city of the blessed, we shall meet and sing together to the praise and glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the Beloved!

The Lord be with you all for His name’s sake! Amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 CORINTHIANS 12, 13:1-6.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—178, 119 (PART 2), 639.**

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